

IN OUR VIEW

It's never too early to stress importance of attending school

Our initial reaction was disbelief when we heard that a truancy court may be created for Woonsocket elementary pupils missing too much school, similar to that now in place for city middle school students. It seems draconian to haul little children before a judge. Hopefully, a truancy court for elementary pupils will never be needed and, if it is, parents will be the ones to face the judge.

However, we do endorse the idea of asking city parents whose elementary-school children are often truant to meet on a voluntary basis with Rhode Island Family Court Judge Jeremiah S. Jeremiah Jr.

The city school system is now in the process of compiling a list of about 50 families whose elementary-aged children have recurring attendance problems. The parents will be asked to meet as a group with Judge Jeremiah. The judge, according to school officials, is expected to say in a positive way that it is important for children to be in school, and he will explain the consequences if they are not.

We believe it is never too early for parents to impress upon their children the importance of attending school, except of course in unusual cases of illness or emergencies. The people who show up every day, be it in class or later in life on the job,

are the ones who wind up making the important decisions and getting ahead, in part because they're present and accounted for when they are needed. The importance of regular, reliable attendance only increases with age, as one's responsibilities in life increase as well.

Another factor that convinced us of the wisdom of asking selected parents to meet with Judge Jeremiah is the effectiveness of the middle school truancy court here in Woonsocket and statewide.

School officials report that attendance at the middle school has improved markedly since the court began, with a 90 to 95 percent improvement rate in the students involved. Statewide, Family Court officials report, the attendance of 300 to 400 middle-school students has improved an average of 49 to 89 percent.

Those figures are impressive. So, if it takes court intervention to drive home the importance of school attendance, then the sooner a judge delivers that message to children and their parents, the better for all. We applaud Deputy School Superintendent Maureen Macera for arranging the session with Judge Jeremiah and perhaps someday she'll even be able to convince us of the need for a truancy court at the elementary level.